How Did Peter's Shadow and Paul's Handkerchiefs Heal People?

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Question: Acts 5:15 indicates that Peter's shadow had the ability to heal people and Acts 19:2 says Paul's handkerchiefs were taken to sick people who were healed and demons came out of them. How do you explain this?

Answer: The apostles were given the power by Jesus to heal and exorcise demons (Matt. 10:8, Mark 16:17-18). The power to heal came from Jesus himself and He simply used Peter and Paul as His instruments.

In Acts 5:15 the Scripture doesn't say the shadow actually transmitted healing. But it's unlikely that people would expect to be healed by the shadow being cast on them if it hadn't happened to at least one person.

In Mark 5:29-30 and 6:56, the people who touched the hem of Jesus' garment were healed. It wasn't the garment that healed them but their faith. Jesus said, "Your faith has made you well" (Mark 5:34). In the case of Peter, the sick people knew Jesus was doing miracles through him. They wanted to get close enough to him to be healed, just as the woman in Mark 5 wanted to be close to Jesus to be healed. Peter's shadow wasn't the source for their healing in Acts 5, just as Jesus' garment wasn't the source for healing in Mark 5. Their faith brought them the healing.

Luke the physician, who wrote the book of Acts, testifies these healings were real. He says, "And God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hand of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and evil spirits went out." (Acts 19:11-12)

Verse 11 points out these were unusual miracles (Greek—"not the ordinary"). All miracles by definition are "out of the ordinary." But in this case God chose an even more unusual way to do miracles—through the handkerchiefs (sweat bands to wipe away perspiration) and the work aprons that Paul used. If God could use Paul's hands to perform miracles, He could also use his garments—similar to the hem of Jesus' garment.

The Scripture doesn't say that Paul prayed over the handkerchiefs and aprons or that he asked for an offering in return. God enabled miracles to be performed in this unusual way so that people who were too sick to come to Paul could be healed.

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